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Friends, colleagues poke fun at Bunton

By ED TODD
Staff Writer

ODESSA — The judge and his old law partner got sentenced Monday night to rounds of scorching witicisms.

"It's fun having fun poked at you," U.S. District Court Judge Lucius D. Bunton III said at the roast.

Bunton, who presides over the Midland-Odessa and Pecos Divisions of the federal court system's Western District of Texas, and Ray Stoker Jr., a member of the Texas State Highways and Public Transportation Commission, got briskly roasted at the behest of the Odessa Legal Secretaries Association's first annual scholarship-benefit roast here.

Approximately 350 lawyers, jurors, politicians, and other friends of Bunton and Stoker attended the roast, which was emceed by Odessa lawyer Jack Tidwell, in Barn A at the Ector County Coliseum.

"You all are roasting and yet you are recognizing two of the finest people," said former Texas Gov. Mark White. "What a (law) firm it would be — Bunton & Stoker, BS."

White, a Democrat ousted out of the governor's office by Republican Bill Clements in 1986, appointed Stoker, his old college chum, to a five-year term on the three-man highway



Judge Lucius Bunton

commission in 1985. Bunton was appointed to the lifetime judgeship by Democratic President Jimmy Carter in 1979.

But the ex-governor said he was going to refrain from roasting Bunton too caustically, "because I'm back to practicing law."

White said Stoker, his old bird-hunting partner, has a motto: "Never

er shot one flying. Never gave one an even chance."

"That's Ray Stoker's motto," said White. "I try to live by it."

Stoker, 48, was billed as the "road fairy" on the festivity's program.

"That has nothing to do with my sexuality," he said in an aside later.

Dallas investor Craig Cannon termed Stoker "a fun-loving, trouble-making individual just like the rest of us." He dedicated a country and western song to the highway commissioner: "How Come You Always Leave Me Holding The Bag?"

Franklin Jones Jr., a Marshall lawyer and past president of the State Bar of Texas, said that the 62-year-old Bunton "contrived" to land his federal judgeship and left Franklin with a "mess." Bunton had been president-elect of the State Bar of Texas in 1979, but resigned the impending honor after his appointment to the judgeship. Franklin succeeded the judge.

"He (Bunton) accepted every honor the State Bar of Texas had to offer, and he never took the job that required the work," Franklin said.

Franklin referred to Bunton as being "anointed" in 1979 as a "high and mighty" federal judge who was "going to practice his witchcraft, or whatever you call it, in West Texas."

Bunton, who is noted for his wit,

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Texas wit and strict adherence to courtroom decorum, in October 1984 presided over a Marshall railroad case in which Franklin was the plaintiff's attorney. A clerk, after witnessing some of Bunton's courtroom antics, remarked: "God save these United States from this Honorable Court."

Delmon Hodges, a Fort Stockton oil broker, said he was one of Bunton's friends.

"There's three of us," Hodges said. "I'm really not his friend," he confessed. "I was director at the First National Bank in Midland and my case comes up next month."

Hodges cited Bunton's name. "Lucius Desha Bunton the III — now, what kind of name is that?" asked Hodges. "It shows you that two generations have fouled up, and one of them is trying to clean up."

Hodges said Mary Jane, Bunton's wife of 40 years, "took him on (in marriage) as a missionary project."

He assaulted Bunton's court record.

"We (Hodges and Bunton's colleagues) checked your record since you have been on the bench and all," Hodges said. "Looking over all of your decisions, you're lucky this is a life-time appointment. You don't have to run for office any more."

Later Bunton retorted: "I look for-



Ray Stoker Jr.

ward to old Delmon to being a defendant in my court. It's going to be a pleasure."

Elton Gilliland, another of the judge's old partners, said the judge "likes to crow about getting up."

Retired Texas Judge Stephen F. Preslar termed his friend Bunton, a West Texas native and former state prosecutor in Marfa in the 1950s, as

"the wit from Marfa or the Marfa wit, and the general consensus was that that was about half right."

Connell Ashley, one of Bunton's former law partners, also chewed on his friend.

"Frankly, there's not a whole lot of difference in praying to the Lord that's in Heaven and praying to the fellow that thinks he's the Lord in Heaven that's on the federal bench," Ashley said.

Ashley noted that "everybody has their songs these days.

"President Reagan has 'Hail To The Chief' and Bob Hope has 'Thanks For The Memories' and Lucius' song is 'Oh, Lord, It's Hard To Be Humble When You're Prefect In Every Way.'"

Ashley noted that Bunton was a cousin to the late President Lyndon B. Johnson.

"If you want to be a good friend of Bunton," he quipped, "if you want to be on his side, tell your adversary (attorney) to go in there (Bunton's courtroom) and say something bad about Lyndon Johnson and say something real bad about the Democratic Party, and say something real bad about Mark White. You're bound to get the judge's attention."